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Thursday, December 20, 2018 metro.us | t: MetroPhill

'BUMBLEBEE'

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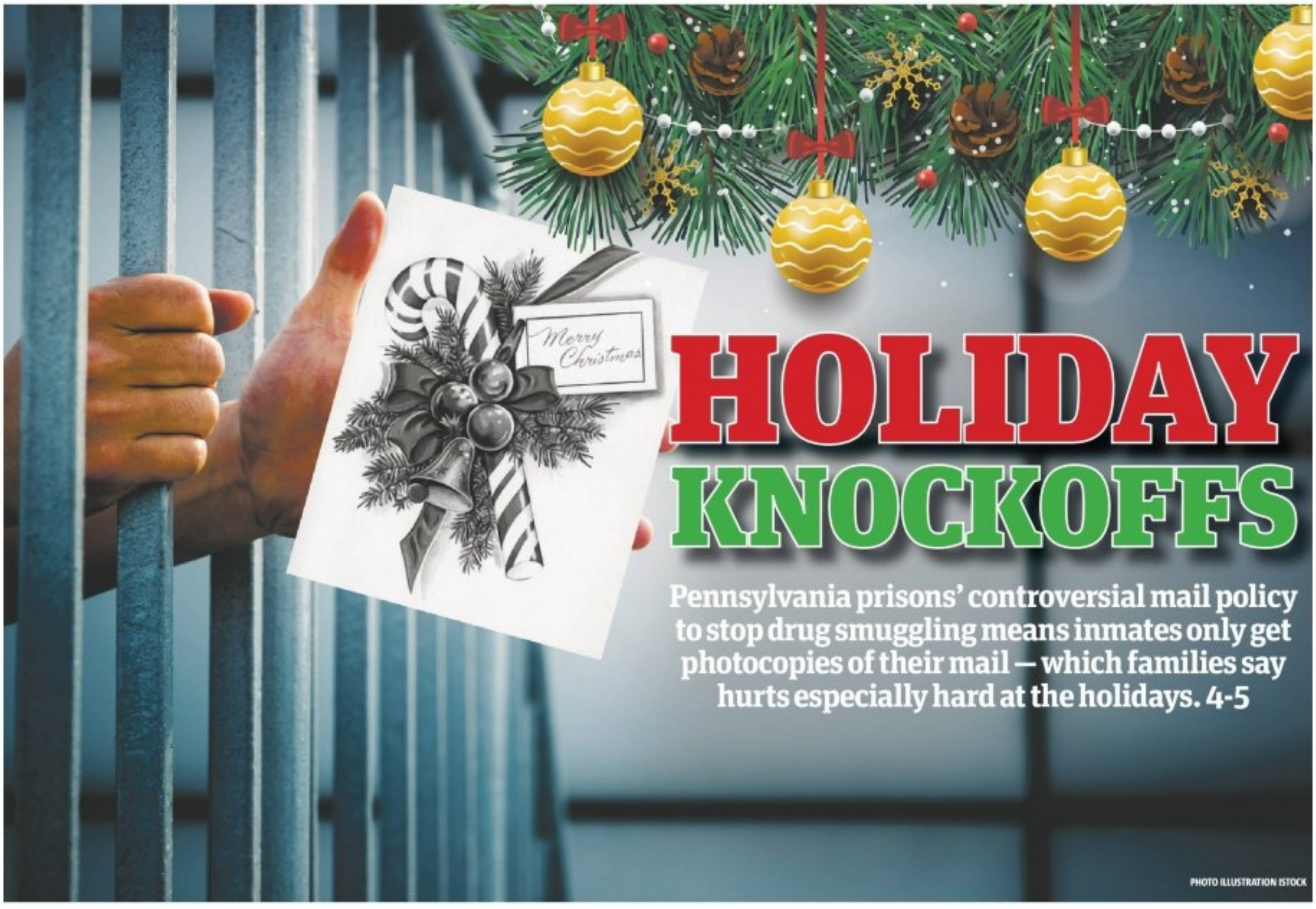

HOLIDAY KNOCKOFFS

Pennsylvania prisons' controversial mail policy to stop drug smuggling means inmates only get photocopies of their mail — which families say hurts especially hard at the holidays. 4-5

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5 THINGS TO KNOW

WELCOME TO METRO PHILLY

SAM NEWHOUSE, REPORTER

Metro readers, thank you for making this year's Tony's Metro Magic a huge success! Your donations of toys through Metro's annual toy drive have gone to underserved children in our communities and made a huge difference in their lives for the holidays. As one of the charitable nonprofits that distributes gifts to children told us, "Just seeing the smiles on the childrens' faces is enough of a reward. These children come from families where they may not always have enough, and without generous donations from Metro's readers, we wouldn't be able to share these gifts with them. Thank you!" ***Read more about the impact of your generosity inside and on Metro.us.***

US BEGINS TO PULL FORCES FROM SYRIA

1 The United States said on Wednesday it has begun withdrawing U.S. forces from Syria while U.S. officials said Washington was considering removing all its troops as it winds up its campaign to retake territory once held by Islamic State. A decision to pull out completely, if confirmed, would raise doubts about how to prevent a resurgence of the militant group, undercut U.S. leverage in the region and undermine diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian civil war now in its eighth year. Reports of a full U.S. military withdrawal drew immediate criticism from some of President Donald Trump's fellow Republicans, who said leaving would strengthen the hand of Russia and Iran, which both support Syrian President Bashar al Assad. "We have started returning United States troops home as we transition to the next phase of this campaign," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in a statement issued after President Donald Trump tweeted that "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there."

COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

2 A U.S. judge on Wednesday struck down Trump administration policies aimed at restricting asylum claims by people citing gang or domestic violence in their home countries and ordered the U.S. government to bring back six deported migrants to reconsider their cases. The ruling is the latest legal setback for the White House on immigration. Last month, a judge in San Francisco ordered a halt to a policy that prevented those entering illegally from Mexico from seeking asylum. The policy at the center of Wednesday's ruling sought to limit the ability of immigrants to fight expedited deportation by narrowing the grounds for claiming "credible fear" if they returned home, the first step in a long asylum process. The policy was challenged in a District of Columbia lawsuit brought by a dozen adults and children. U.S. Judge Emmet Sullivan said in a 107-page opinion the policy violated both immigration and administrative law. "And because it is the will of Congress — not the whims of the executive — that determines the standard for expedited removal, the court finds that those policies are unlawful," Sullivan wrote.

SNOW SCULPTURE UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN CHINA

3 A 40-foot-tall pig-themed snow sculpture is seen ahead of the Harbin Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Exposition on Wednesday in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province of China. The snow sculpture featuring three pigs is about 72 feet long.

GETTY IMAGES

FB SHARES DROP AS DATA PRIVACY FALLOUT SPREADS

4 Facebook Inc. shares sank on Wednesday as concerns about its ability to safeguard user data sparked a government lawsuit, criticism in the U.S. Congress and a New York Times report on how it had shared data with other companies. The stock of the world's largest social media company fell 7.25 percent, its biggest intraday drop since July, taking losses for the year to about 24 percent. Investors are concerned about snowballing legal and regulatory efforts over data use polices that have upset many customers and could carry significant penalties and costs. In particular, the Silicon Valley firm has drawn global scrutiny since disclosing earlier this year that a third-party personality quiz distributed on Facebook gathered profile information on 87 million users worldwide and sold the data to British political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica. Washington, D.C., Attorney General Karl Racine said the U.S. capital city was suing Facebook, accusing it of misleading users because it had known about the incident for two years before disclosing it.

HUMAN TRAFFICKER AT OLYMPICS GETS 30 YEARS

5 An "evil" man who tried to traffic a teenage boy into London to be sold for sex during the 2012 Olympics has been sentenced to 30 years in a U.S. prison, in a case of human trafficking that draws attention to international sporting events. Jason Gandy was stopped in July 2012 by immigration officers in Britain who suspected something was wrong with the adult man traveling with an unrelated 15-year-old boy, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said. British authorities sent Gandy home to Houston, Texas, for trial. He was convicted of sex trafficking of minors in July and sentenced this week by U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal, who told him: "You are evil, and most evil are those who willingly exploit others for their own gratification." Along with the incident at the London Olympics, there were reports of Nigerians taken to Russia for sex during the World Cup this past summer and, in the United States, football's Super Bowl also draws concerns over trafficking. However, experts are split on whether such spectacles actively fuel trafficking.

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COURTESY OF DECARCERATE PA

New pain felt over DOC mail policy at holidays

To crack down on drug smuggling, inmates won't be receiving any hand-written holiday cards this year.

SAM NEWHOUSE
sam.newhouse@metro.us

For the 25 years that her son has been incarcerated in state prison, Lorraine Haw has sent him a Christmas card every year. But due to a new state prison policy, under which all mail is scanned and copies are sent to inmates, she doesn't see the point anymore.

"This will be my first year that I'm not able to," Haw told Metro. "I'm not sending one thing at all until all of this changes. I want him to receive the card I sent him, not a photocopy."

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) instituted controversial new mail and book policies on Aug. 29 to crack down on drug smuggling after a rash of guards fell ill due to suspected drug exposure over the summer. Currently, inmates are forbidden from receiving original letters. All non-legal mail gets sent to a central facility in Florida, scanned, destroyed, and the inmates get a copy. Legal mail gets opened by prison staff in front of inmates, photocopies are given to the inmates, and the originals are destroyed.

"[Drug smuggling] was an increasing threat to the roughly 13,000 staff and 47,000 inmates who work and live in our facilities. ... Mail was the No. 1 path of contraband into facilities and one staff member was sickened while opening mail at one of our facilities," a DOC spokeswoman said via email. "Corrections officers and staff who work inside the 25 state correctional institutions risk their lives every day. These individuals should not have to fear exposure to drugs that could sicken them as well."

Haw has been sending drawings by her son's children, including one of her playing tic-tac-toe with him, by mail to her son, Philip Ocampo, for 25 years, ever since he was convicted of felony murder for participat-

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ing in a robbery during which an accomplice killed the victim.

He is now serving the mandatory sentence for that charge — life without parole.

Haw said the new mail policy so estranges her from the actual letter-writing process that she would rather not send anything at all.

"He's getting a photocopy of a piece of paper that a stranger is photocopying from the card I sent him. There's no feeling on the card, and he's not getting it straight from me, from my hand, from his mother," she said. "When I write my son, I cry over my letters, I even throw perfume of mine over it so he'll be able to smell me and not forget me. You can't copy that."

"I'm not sending one thing at all until all of this changes. I want him to receive the card I sent him, not a photocopy."

Lorraine Haw

Haw, an organizer with the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration (CADBI), was joined by other family members of inmates and activists with groups like Decarcerate PA and Books Through Bars on Dec. 19 to deliver holiday cards on Tuesday to Gov. Tom Wolf's Philadelphia office in protest of the mail policy.

Patricia Vickers, another mother of an inmate and organizer with CABDI as well as the Human Rights Coalition, also said she no longer sees the point in sending holiday letters or even birthday cards.

"My son's birthday is this month also," Vickers said. "I take a lot of time with my cards. I try to get that special card that says what I'm trying to express. Sometimes the card says it better than what I can say in words — the color, the picture in front of it, and all of that work is just gone. He doesn't get to touch the card, he doesn't get to keep it, it's destroyed. The actual card is destroyed. A picture is taken of the card, and that goes to him. It destroys the whole impact. The bottom line is, I didn't send him a card, I sent him an email saying 'Happy Birthday.' ... That's just so impersonal. That's what you would do for an acquaintance, text them 'Happy Birthday,' not someone you love, your son."

Vickers' son is also serving life in prison, for a murder committed when he was 17. (A recent Supreme Court decision on so-called "juvenile lifers" made him eligible for parole; parole was rejected this year and he is up for reconsideration next year.)

After a public outcry over the banning of book donations, the DOC changed its policies around book donations, which can now be received at a central Secure Processing Center before going to inmates.

Haw and Vickers both questioned the wisdom of the mail policy — the contract for which costs $15 million. They said all inmates should not be banned from mail due to the illegal actions of few, and questioned if mail could be safely processed at a central facility as with book donations.

While the DOC said the Smart Communications Florida facility has reduced turnaround time to 24 hours from receipt of mail to delivery to prisons, it "does not have the staff at the center to screen and process thousands of pieces of mail each week (one million pages a month)."

The governor acknowledged the complaints at a Christmas tree-lighting ceremony last week, saying, "We obviously have a safety problem that affects the prisoners and the staff and we want to do something about that to keep everyone safe. I think we are trying to do it the right way and we are working with different groups to protect everyone's constitutional rights."

Vickers said representatives at Wolf's office committed to scheduling a meeting with activists and representatives of the governor on the issue at a future date.

"All evidence shows maintaining family and community ties is so important to reducing recidivism," said Layne Mullett, an organizer with Decarcerate PA and CADBI. "Gov. Wolf and the DOC are intentionally making that connection harder. To already be experiencing the disconnection of being hours away from friends and family and loved ones, and being surrounded by concrete walls — it makes all the little points of connection even more meaningful."

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Federal bill would regulate US sports betting

The bill was praised by the NFL, NCAAA and USTA.

The nascent U.S. legal sports betting market would be subject to federal oversight under a bill introduced in Congress on Wednesday, one that will surely face opposition from the casino industry and some states.

Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch and Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer introduced the bill, which aims to protect consumers and sports integrity and would require states to seek federal approval to run a sports betting program.

The legislation would create a national clearinghouse for wagering data and require that sportsbooks use only official game data from professional leagues — something that has already begun happening through a series of private deals.

For years, the leagues fought legalization, arguing that sports betting posed a danger to game integrity. That all changed when the U.S. Supreme Court in May left it up to states to decide whether to regulate the wagers.

Now, the new U.S. market is potentially worth many billions of dollars to sports leagues, casinos, sportsbook operators, tech firms, advertisers and others.

States like New Jersey, which has long sought to capitalize on sports betting by legalizing and taxing it, may be upset over any efforts at federal oversight.

It was, after all, a 1992 federal bill co-authored by Hatch that banned the activity in the first place, outside of Nevada, which was grandfathered into the law.

U.S. Rep. Dina Titus, of Nevada, said the bill "would inject uncertainty into an established and regulated industry, weaken Nevada's ability to promptly adapt to maintain its gold standard, and risk causing bettors and operators to leave the regulated market."

The bill is not likely to be passed this year with only a few days left in the legislative season.

While Hatch is retiring from the Senate and acknowledged that the bill was a "placeholder," Schumer will return next year and said he will push the bill forward for a vote "very soon."

The National Football League, National Council on Problem Gambling, United States Tennis Association and NCAA praised the bill.

"[The bill is] an unprecedented and inappropriate expansion of federal involvement in the gaming industry, which is currently one of the most strictly regulated in the country."

Sara Slane, senior VP of public affairs for the American Gaming Association

Sara Slane, senior vice president of public affairs for the American Gaming Association, a casino industry group, said the legislation is "an unprecedented and inappropriate expansion of federal involvement in the gaming industry, which is currently one of the most strictly regulated in the country."

For some, it failed on other accounts. The Sports Fans Coalition said it would push for the inclusion of more robust consumer protections, according to Executive Director Brian Hess. REUTERS

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MLB, Cuba ink deal so players can sign without defecting

Jose Abreu. GETTY IMAGES

Major League Baseball and Cuba's Baseball Federation said on Wednesday they had inked a deal allowing Cuban players to sign with U.S. teams without needing to defect from the Communist-run island and undertake dangerous journeys via human traffickers.

The deal will mark the first time since the Caribbean country's 1959 revolution that Cuban players can legally sign with MLB teams without the need to defect and is a ray of light in fraught bilateral relations that have deteriorated since Donald Trump became president.

Under the agreement, which took three years to hammer out, MLB teams will pay the Cuban Baseball Federation a "release fee," they said.

"Our primary objective in this agreement is to provide players from Cuba a path to the major leagues without having to endure the hardships many of our players have already experienced," MLB Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem told Reuters.

Halem said that the deal fell under a general license that provided an exemption to the decades-old U.S. trade embargo on Cuba.

Players who are at least 25 and with six years of service in the Cuban leagues will be free to sign with MLB teams, according to the terms of the deal. Other players will have to seek permission first. If they defect, they will need to face a waiting period of one to two years.

Many players in Cuba, where the minimum salary is $50 per month, have in the past undertaken risky journeys abroad in order to sign multimillion-dollar contracts with U.S. professional baseball leagues.

In one of the most famous examples, Yasiel Puig defected from Cuba on a speedboat at age 21 and soon found himself entangled with Mexico's notorious Zetas crime organization, which threatened to chop off his arm if it failed to receive the promised $250,000 fee for his passage.

When Puig finally reached U.S. shores in 2012, he was rewarded with a seven-year, $42 million contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Players who defected had to wait eight years before returning to Cuba as tourists and applying for repatriation and give up any hope of playing for Cuba's national team.

"Knowing that the next generation of Cuban baseball players will not endure the unimaginable fate of past Cuban players is the realization of an impossible dream for all of us," said Cuban defector Jose Abreu, now a slugger for the Chicago White Sox.

REUTERS

"Our primary objective in this agreement is to provide players from Cuba a path to the major leagues without having to endure the hardships many of our players have already experienced."

Dan Halem, MLB deputy commissioner

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ALL IMAGES BY LENYON WHITAKER

Metro Magic wraps up with lots of toys from readers

"It's an honor and privilege to continue the tradition."

TERRY MOSELEY
Terry.Moseley@metro.us

The 9th annual Metro Magic toy drive has come to a close and we'd like to take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank the readers in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City for their generous and thoughtful donations.

Named after Tony Metcalf, the former editor-in-chief of Metro US who passed in 2013, the toy drive is dedicated to children in need, especially during the holiday season.

With the assistance of our distribution team in NYC, the first group of toys was delivered to The Coalition for the Homeless in New York City. "We so appreciate it!" said Anya Tudisco, executive assistant for the charity.

In Philadelphia, gifts were delivered to the Institute for the Development of African American Youth (IDDAY). Led by founder Dr. S. Archye Leacock, IDDAY offers programs ranging from Intensive InHome Supervision and Out of School Time to College Bound, Young Fathers United and Don't Fall Down in the Hood.

Accepting in-kind donations for Boston's charity organization, Heading Home, Jillian Smith expressed her gratitude for the toys. "We are so honored to be the selected nonprofit from the generous donations of your Boston readers. Thank you, thank you, thank you for all that you do!"

Metro intends to keep Tony's Metro Magic holiday toy drive going for years to come. "Every year, our readers continue to humble us with their generosity and compassion for children in need over the holidays," said Alek Korab, Metro US editor-in-chief. "It's an honor and privilege to continue the tradition of giving back to the community with the help of our readers — for that, we are grateful." TERRY MOSELEY

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Pat King
Grumble Editor

A DECENT HOLIDAY HANGOVER CURE

All families don't celebrate the holidays in the same ways. But if yours is like mine, there is a 150% chance that merry libations will be just as much of a conjoining centerpiece this Christmas as the presents underneath the tree. In fact, big bottles of booze are usually my go-to present for some of my family members year in and year out and cracking them open after meals is something that has become a little bit of a tradition.

While the excitement of these presents usually leads to taste after taste until our cheeks are as red as Rudolph's nose, the next morning can be a bit of a come-down hangover from the joyous night before. This can be tough as the day after Christmas is usually a big travel day for many and finding a hangover cure can be crucial in this situation. I'm sad to say that year after year I have yet to find the best holiday hangover cure that can get me right as rain before traveling. Help us out! Send your best Holiday hangover cures to **grumble@metro.us** and we will share them here!

VENT TO US! GRUMBLE@METRO.US

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MY HUMBLE MOMENT

The other evening coming home from work around 6 p.m., I got off the train at my stop. When I reached the platform, I stepped aside to adjust my knapsack when a woman came over to get my attention. I thought one of the knapsack zippers was open. Not so. She pulled a c-ring hook (carabiner) from her pocket and clamped it to the carry handle of my knapsack. Then she asked me to hold her cane so that she can take my tote bag & clip it to the c-ring. VIOLA!! I'm now hands free. I was like, wow, thank you!! I'm quite the MacGuyver and come up with quick-fixes, but never did I think of that. I was overjoyed with her little act of kindness that I couldn't stop smiling and thanking her. I could tell that she appreciated my genuine enthusiasm over that little hook. I wished her a hearty Merry Christmas and said I'd share the idea with others!!

— **Ali,** *Metro New York reader*

Please remember to send your Humbles to **humble@metro.us**. These submissions can be acts of gratitude, positivity or kindness that you have seen throughout the day.

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Push for what you want. Don't stop until you are satisfied with your effort and the results you get. A gift, bonus or unexpected reward is heading your way.

Taurus Sign up for something you want to learn. Talk to an expert about the possibility of picking his or her brain or apprenticing. Opportunity is within reach.

Gemini Emotions will fester if someone is not being up-front with you. Check the facts before you agree to something that could end up being more trouble than it's worth.

Cancer If you share your unique ideas, you'll be surprised at the interest someone shows. A makeover will give you the pick-me-up you need to help build your confidence.

Leo Have fun with children or volunteer to help out in your community. What you contribute will raise your profile and make you and your loved ones proud.

Virgo Don't give in to someone pestering you for something you can't afford or don't want to do. Make moderate choices and stick to them, regardless of what others do.

Libra A change will do you good and help you adjust to an offer that you find tempting. Don't let anyone make you feel bad or guilty for the choices you make.

Scorpio Love is on the rise, and plans to romance someone special should be put into play. Sharing a quality moment will help cement an important relationship.

Sagittarius You'll have a change of heart when it comes to personal matters. Look at the past, learn from your mistakes and do what's required to turn a negative into a positive.

Capricorn Get everyone at home involved in the preparations and changes you want to make. Purging and donating things you no longer need is favored.

Aquarius Say what's on your mind and clear the air. You cannot move forward unless you take care of unfinished business. Changes at home will give you something to look forward to.

Pisces Choose your battles wisely. Walk away from impossible situations. You will feel better and accomplish more if you concentrate on your personal finances, contracts or on handling someone else's affairs. EUGENIA LAST

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LIFESTYLE

The hit Marvel series returns to Hulu this weekend. ALL PHOTOS MICHAEL DESMOND / HULU

Meet the new bad boy of Marvel's 'Runaways' season 2

Newcomer Jan Luis Castellanos is excited for the fans to see what's coming.

ANDREW HUSBAND
letters@metro.us

At the 2018 New York Comic Con, Hulu announced that the second season of its popular Marvel series "Runaways" would feature a new character. Topher, the century-old vampire who featured in the original comics, would debut in season 2. The streamer didn't say if their take would follow co-creators Brian K. Vaughan and Adrian Alphona's version to a fault, but they did name the young actor who would be playing him.

"I'm super grateful to be joining the Marvel/Hulu 'Runaways' family," Jan Luis Castellanos said in a statement at the time of his casting announcement. "It has been a dream come true. Topher is a tough and complicated kid, and it was very exciting to bring him to life."

Castellanos, a native of the Dominican Republic who grew up in New Jersey, spoke to Metro about his breakout role just ahead of the second season's premiere on Friday. And even though the smoke has cleared, the production is over and the completed season is about to stream, the 23-year-old actor still can't believe that he's now a part of the Marvel universe.

"I remember watching 'The Avengers' when I was younger. I was like, 'Oh my God this is amazing!'" he exclaims. "I've always been a fan, so for me, it was just a straight-up dream come true to do this. It's a universe filled with endless possibilities. It's something that I definitely wanted to be a part of and I'm really excited about what's to come."

Jan Luis Castellanos joins the cast of "Runaways" this season.

The young actor has a handful of credits here and there, but "Runaways" represents his biggest role yet. This prospect equally excites and terrifies Castellanos, but he also feels lucky to have received a crash course in modern acting because of the experience.

"It was like meeting a girl for the first time," he says of meeting the cast. "I walked onto the studio soundstage and they were just all there waiting for me after a scene. They were so great! Especially Gregg Sulkin and Rhenzy Feliz. Gregg taught me a lot. I learned so much from him while we were working together on set. As for Rhenzy, we immediately connected because his family is also from the Dominican Republic. Plus, there's Ariela Barer and Allegra Acosta… it was such a Latino-centric set and it was great."

Castellanos also counts himself lucky for having had the chance to work on such a technically complex production. "Runaways" is a show about superheroes and villains, after all, so this requires a dazzling array of stunt-work, practical effects and visual effects for most of the characters – including Topher.

"I felt a lot of pressure, being surrounded by all of that," he says of the stunts and effects, "but I got to learn so much. And the great thing about it was, I felt good doing it. I was motivated to give it my best."

He takes a beat to laugh to himself before wrapping things up.

"Man, I'm blushing now," says Castellanos. "I still can't believe I got to be a part of this."

"Runaways" season 2 premieres Dec. 21 on Hulu.

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'Timeless' movie is exactly what the fans have been waiting for

The cult-favorite series returns from cancellation for one final adventure.

ANDREW HUSBAND
letters@metro.us

"Timeless" returns for a holiday special. DARREN MICHAELS/SONY/NBC

Over the summer, fans of NBC's time-traveling caper "Timeless" were disheartened to learn that the network had canceled the series again.

The decision made sense business-wise, as the Sony Television production's being distributed by NBCUniversal, a rival media company, meant a complex web of deals were at play. And if the show at the heart of those deals wasn't earning enough ratings to satisfy one or both studios, then its chances for survival were moot.

Despite having lackluster ratings, however, "Timeless" proved to be yet another example of a television program whose audience base was extremely devoted. Like "Star Trek" and "Firefly" before it, "Timeless" found itself in the middle of an intense fan-driven campaign to save it from the ax. It worked the first time it was canceled back in 2017, but this year's cancellation took. Even so, with the news came a nugget of hope - a deal for a television movie was in the works.

Six months later, the second season cliffhanger will finally be addressed (and more) in a special two-hour series finale set to air on Thursday. Titled "The Miracle of Christmas, Part I" and "The Miracle of Christmas, Part II" respectively, the two hours will premiere back-to-back on NBC, thereby bringing the adventures of the "time team" to a close.

And so it does, because everyone from the series is back for the show's final bow. Lucy Preston (Abigail Spencer), the history professor turned "Lifeboat" team leader; Master Sergeant Wyatt Logan (Matt Lanter), the team's military liaison; Rufus Carlin (Malcolm Barrett), the Lifeboat's lead programmer and reluctant pilot; and Garcia Flynn (Goran Višnjić), former adversary turned ally against the Rittenhouse group. Everyone, along with the rest of the supporting cast, is back. So what's been happening?

Well, at the end of season 2, Rufus was dead and Lucy and Wyatt were left to wallow in their guilt. Or, at least that was until future versions of the pair arrived in another Lifeboat and invited them to go and save Rufus. "The Miracle of Christmas, Part I" picks up right where the show left off with the prospect of crisscrossing timelines with future and former selves, but for the sake of avoiding spoilers, that's where NBC's official episode description (and ours) stops.

Newcomers tuning into for the first time to "Timeless" probably won't know what's going on following the opening credits, and the show does little to amend this. Why? Because Thursday's two-part finale is primarily for the fans who support the show throughout its rocky run. Yet if anyone unfamiliar with the series wants to catch up, they can stream the first two seasons of Hulu.

The "Timeless" two-part finale premieres tonight at 8 p.m. on NBC.

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How 'Bumblebee' stopped the 'Transformers' franchise from being '*boring*'

Producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura and writer Christina Hodson talk us through it.

GREGORY WAKEMAN
Gregory.Wakeman@metro.us

"Bumblebee" gives "Transformers" the shot in the arm that the franchise needed. PARAMOUNT PICTURES

After five films in 10 years, Lorenzo di Bonaventura knew that the "Transformers" franchise needed rejuvenating.

So in the summer of 2015 he assembled a writers' room, where some of Hollywood's best and burgeoning scribes came together to discuss potential sequels, prequels and spin-offs. Di Bonaventura admits to Metro that the "fresh eyes and new takes" from the writers' room "freed minds to look at the franchise in different ways," and the time was nigh to make a change.

"'The Last Knight' was the last in the Bay series. People think we did this movie as a reaction to the fifth movie," says di Bonaventura. "'Bumblebee' was being planned before the fifth movie. We had done five of these with a particular aesthetic and we wanted to do something different.

"As a filmmaker, you get tired of making the same thing. And we wanted to do something different, too," he adds. "We also felt we owed the fans something new. If you keep a franchise going, you are doing it for the fans as much as yourself. I get bored, why wouldn't they, at a certain level?"

Christina Hodson pitched her "core idea" for "Bumblebee" — of the Transformer leaving the Civil War on Cybertron and coming to Earth on his own in 1987, where he forges a friendship with a teenage girl — in the writers' room.

"I went into the room knowing I wanted to do a girl and her car," she explains. "Steven Spielberg [executive producer] had always said he wanted to do a Bumblebee standalone. He said back in 2007, promoting the first movie, that he loved the story of a boy and his car. It was so personal, so intimate.

"I remember the first car I had. It was a piece of s–t," adds Hodson. "But I just remember the excitement, even when I first started my dad's car, it was just the joy and wonder of starting this big hunk of metal."

Di Bonaventura instantly knew that Hodson's idea was perfect to breathe life back into the franchise.

"We wanted to focus in on a character and we wanted to tell a story in a different way to what we had done before," says di Bonaventura. "We wanted an intimate story. That was the key decision early on. We had done a boy and his car, so when she pitched a girl and her car, it felt different."

"I have always wanted to put female characters in muscular and masculine films," says Hodson. "I say masculine, but I don't think they're masculine. They're just perceived as masculine; girls love explosions just as much as boys.

"The timing is fortuitous, I guess, because there is a mandate where people want more female movies," she adds.

Clearly a lot of people feel the same way, because "Bumblebee" has become the most critically acclaimed entry into the "Transformers" franchise yet.

"Bumblebee" opens in theaters Dec. 21.

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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Last-minute gift ideas

Don't head to your holiday party empty-handed.

KATELYN CHEF

Got a bad case of the holiday ho-hums? It's not too late to turn your last-minute shopping woes into jolly ho-hos. Why, you ask? Well, we happen to have a few last-minute gifts that are thoughtful and yes, very merry. After all, we know a thing (or two) about putting the "pro" in procrastinator.

1

Any tailgater (or marshmallow maker) would love to receive a portable fire pit such as this compact (and essentially smokeless) wood and charcoal burning fire pit from BioLite.
Fire Pit, Wood & Charcoal Burning Fire Pit, $199.95, bioliteenergy.com

2

Gifting the Gen Z generation can be tricky—what to get? How about a clip on ping pong set from SunnyLife Australia?
Clip on Ping Pong Set, $35, dormify.com

3

Usually, right after Christmas, the winter weather really starts to rage. When you've had enough snow, a warm beach print from Gray Malin can ease those sad seasonal blues.
La Jolla Shores Vertical, $249, graymalin.com

4

If he loves funky socks, he'll love a cool sweater to wear all winter long.
OG Sassy Sweater, $80, myairblaster.com

5

The desire to redecorate after the holiday décor comes down is as real as any Christmas cookie plate. The rugs from Well Woven are stylish and versatile enough to fit any home décor.
Ora Blue Modern Rug, $54, wellwoven.com

6

Christmas bows are green, and our wine glasses are filled with red. Any wine lover would approve of a three-pack (plus $50 Ticketmaster gift card) red wine gift set.
Red Wine 3 Pack + $50 Ticketmaster Gift Card, $95, dreamingtree-wines.com

7

Naturally soft sneakers that are sustainable as well as made from wool sound like an eco-perfect gift to give any shoe aficionado.
Men's Tuke Matcha Wool Runners, $95, allbirds.com

8

Stockings that are stuffed with practical necessities such as beanies and warm hats are so appreciated during this chilly season of giving!
The Uniform, Pink Beanie, $24, coalheadwear.com

9

What to get the little one on your list can be puzzling too. The new Google Home Mini featuring Disney's Mickey Mouse is just what Santa forgot to bring!
Den Series for Google Home Mini featuring Disney Mickey Mouse, $19.95 (Google Home sold separately), otterbox.com

10

Any #plantlady will get a kick out of these banana leaves inspired earrings. So tropic-cool!
Monstera Leaf earrings, $36, bando.com

11

Flowers that last all year long are truly a gift that she'll love! The fresh-cut flower assortments from RoseBox not only look straight out of the pages of Vogue, but they last for 365 days!
Small White Box with Red Flame Roses, $139.30, roseboxnyc.com

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This smaller and less expensive version of the Hub is perfect for anyone who needs a little assistance in their smart home but may not have the free hands. Compatible with 1,000 smart devices from over 150 popular brands, the Google Home Mini is the ideal stocking stuffer for that person in your life who just needs some answers to the questions they float out in the void. Or at least, getting their schedule together for 2019. "Okay Google, what does my schedule look like today?" ***$29, free same day or next-day shipping with orders over $35.***

2

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Creator, Romano Ricci, imagined the scents of his perfumes in this Juliette Has a Gun Discovery Kit as being "olfactory portraits" of a specific woman in his life. The kit includes a 1x 4 ml of his hit fragrance Not a Perfume, and 7 of the brand's best-sellers in 1.7 ml bottles: MMMM..., Lady Vengeance, Another Oud, Gentlewoman, Anyway, Mad Madame and Sunny Side Up. ***$16.39, free same day or next-day delivery with orders over $35.***

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4

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L.O.L Dolls will no doubt be one of the hottest toys this Holiday season. Were you able to pick yours up in time for the big day? It would be a shame if we had a "Jingle All The Way" style situation on our hands. Well, don't fear. With Jet.com you will be able to order this L.O.L. Surprise! Bigger Surprise kit to give your kids the ultimate unboxing experience along with two L.O.L. Dolls and some of the coolest accessories. ***$115.99, free same day or next-day shipping with orders over $35.***

5

GOOGLE HOME HUB (IN CHALK)

Smart homes are becoming more popular these days. Having the right command center to help control things like your lights, security cameras, and even your TVs and sound systems is absolutely crucial and it does not get better than the Google Home Hub - Chalk. This hub can sync up to 5,000+ smart devices from 400+ popular brands and can answer all of your burning questions and play your favorite songs through voice command as you are busy doing the dishes. ***$129, free same day or next-day shipping with orders over $35.***

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THINGS TO DO

Jingle while you mingle

Tinsel will be participating in the crawl. SOCIETY HILL FILMS

The Jingle Bars Crawl is this Saturday, Dec. 22.

MOLLY GIVEN
Molly.Given@metro.us

Jingle bells, jingle bells, Jingle Bars Crawl — it's time for one of the most festive bar crawls in the city. The Jingle Bars Crawl takes place in the Midtown Village and Rittenhouse area and brings holly jolly cheer everywhere it goes. There are over ten bars participating, each one is decked out with plenty of holiday decorations, music and drink specials.

The fun starts at check-in where you will get a wristband guaranteeing you entrance to participating bars without a cover, a map of all the watering holes included on the crawl and a list as well so you can check it twice (doesn't matter if the bars are naughty or nice.) You and your group of friends can crawl in any order during the designated crawl time. Check-in takes place at Smokin Betty's (116 S 11th St., Philadelphia).

Apart from the free cover to all participating bars your ticket also gets you drink specials, live entertainment including performances from popular DJ's, holiday swag (Mistletoe, Beads, Santa Hats and more) and also a punch card to use at each bar you visit. Having four hole punches on your card gets you something special at the Stats on 17th afterparty (111 S 17th St., Philadelphia).

Drink specials include $3 select domestic beer, $4 select craft beer, $4 mixed well drinks and $5 Mrs. Claus' Naughty Punch (each bar will have their own version of this specialty cocktail.) Select locations will even have $5 brunch bites to indulge in during the Jingle Bars Crawl.

Tickets are $10-$20. You must be 21 or older to participate in the Jingle Bars Crawl, there are no refunds with tickets, but they are transferable to other people if you cannot attend. You must have an electronic or printed version of your ticket to crawl, extra guests with your group will pay $20 at the door at participating bars if they don't have a wristband for the event. The bar crawl starts at 12 pm, and specials stop at 6 pm. Ugly sweaters, Santa costumes, holiday onesies and other outfits are encouraged.

Locations Include

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(1316 Chestnut St.)
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(1320 Chestnut St.)
Smokin Betty's
Wrap Shack on 11th st
(112 S 11th St.)
Tavern on Broad
(200 S Broad St.)
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Tradesmans is a stop on the Jingle Bars Crawl. AVERSA PR

Three potential head coaching options for Flyers

If the Flyers decide not to hire Joel Quenneville, here are a few more coaches they could consider.

JOVAN ALFORD
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Mike Yeo. GETTY IMAGES

Two weeks after the Philadelphia Flyers decided to cut ties with GM Ron Hextall, the team announced on Monday that they were firing head coach Dave Hakstol.

Hakstol, who was in his fourth season with Philadelphia, reportedly asked new Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher for a vote of confidence before his firing. Fletcher could not give Hakstol that and from there, the rest is history.

Replacing Hakstol for the interim will be Scott Gordon, who is the head coach of the Flyers' AHL affiliate, the Lehigh Valley Phantoms.

No one was surprised that Hakstol was fired, especially since the team was struggling and getting blown out on a nightly basis. This season, the Flyers have a record of 12-15-14 (28 points), good for dead last in the Metropolitan Division.

Nevertheless, with Hakstol out the door, it is now time to figure out who will be the next guy to lead the Flyers. One name that has come up is former Chicago Blackhawks head coach Joel Quenneville.

According to Dave Isaac of the Courier-Post, Quenneville has been offered the job and will accept it. However, at Monday's press conference, Fletcher told reporters that he had not asked Chicago for permission to speak to the 60-year-old head coach.

With that being the case, who else should the Flyers take a look at? Here are three potential outside-the-box head coaching options:

TODD MCLELLAN

McLellan was fired by the Edmonton Oilers in November after they got off to a bad start to begin the season (9-10-1). The 51-year-old head coach, surprisingly, was replaced by former Flyers head coach Ken Hitchcock.

Just like Hakstol, McLellan was in his fourth season with Edmonton and had an overall record of 23-119-24. During his tenure, the Oilers made the Stanley Cup playoffs last season but did not see the postseason the previous two seasons. This was a far cry from what he was able to do in San Jose, where he had six playoff appearances and three division titles.

MIKE YEO

Yeo was among the four head coaches who were fired in November. The former St. Louis Blues coach was replaced by onetime Flyers head coach Craig Berube.

Are you starting to see a pattern here?

At the time of his firing, the Blues had a record of 7-9-13 for 13 points, making them one of the worst teams in the NHL.

Unlike McLellan and Hakstol, Yeo was in the third year of a four-year contract. Coincidentally, he took over for Hitchcock halfway through the 2016 season.

Yeo led the Blues to the playoffs that season and had an overall coaching record of 73-48-11. Before joining St. Louis, he was the head coach of the Minnesota Wild for five seasons (2011-16).

TROY MANN

Mann is the head coach of Ottawa Senators' AHL affiliate, Belleville Senators, and could be due for a promotion to the big leagues sooner than later. The 48-year-old head coach played a big part in developing a lot of the players on the Washington Capitals' roster as he was the lead guy for their AHL affiliate in Hershey.

With the Hershey Bears, Mann led them to a couple of Atlantic Division titles and went to the Calder Cup Finals in 2016. Before becoming their head coach, he was an assistant coach from 2009-10 to 2012-13.

This season, the Senators have a record of 12-15-2 for 26 points, second-to-last place in the AHL's North Division.

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NFL Week 16 Power Rankings: Saints go top

1. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS (12-2) DEF. CAROLINA, 12-9. LAST WEEK: 2

The Saints began this season narrowly losing a blowout where Tampa Bay shredded their defense. The offense didn't miss a beat from there, carrying them to 10 straight victories and the top of this list. Now that unit has started to struggle, and it's the defense that has kept the wins coming to New Orleans. If the Saints can put it all together — as they did in 2017 — alongside the home field advantage they're on pace for, they'll be the favorites at a time when it seems many of the top contenders (New Orleans included) are stumbling.

2. LOS ANGELES CHARGERS (11-3) DEF. KANSAS CITY, 29-28. LAST WEEK: 4

The odds are still stacked against the Chargers in the AFC West: They hold a worse division record than Kansas City and need the Chiefs to lose to finish higher than the fifth seed in the AFC. That acknowledged, they just won on the road in Kansas City to end a nine-game losing streak to their division rivals and can make their case as the hottest team in the NFL; they've won 10 of the last 11. Keenan Allen, Melvin Gordon and Austin Ekeler could all return this week.

3. KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (11-3) LOST TO LA CHARGERS, 29-28. LAST WEEK: 1

The Chiefs still hold the inside track: win out, and home field advantage in the AFC is theirs. This season could have been a step back for Kansas City — much of their defense moved on and an unproven quarterback stepped in to replace Alex Smith. Instead, it has served as a launching pad for Patrick Mahomes' career. Ten touchdowns in the final two games would give him the NFL record in his first season as a starter. That may sound unlikely, but he accomplished the feat just three weeks ago. For the Chiefs, in light of recent failures, it's all about playoff success.

P.J. Williams (No. 26) of the New Orleans Saints. GETTY IMAGES

4. CHICAGO BEARS (10-4) DEF. GREEN BAY, 24-17. LAST WEEK: 6

After a two-and-a-half-sack performance against the Packers, Khalil Mack officially has more sacks than the Oakland Raiders (in two fewer games played.) That Bears draft pick is probably looking a lot less attractive than it did at the start of the 2018 season as well, as things are falling into place for the Bears to possibly steal a first-round bye if the Rams drop another game. The Bears just clinched their first division title since Jay Cutler led them to the playoffs in 2010.

5. LOS ANGELES RAMS (11-3) LOST TO PHILADELPHIA, 30-23. LAST WEEK: 3

The bad news? The Rams offense seems to have reached its peak in their 54-51 shootout with Kansas City. And that's fair, that would be most offenses' peak. But that game came in Week 11. In their back-to-back losses, the Rams have struggled to stretch the field and forgotten they have an MVP candidate to hand the ball off to. The good news: the Rams have already won their division, their remaining games are against the Cardinals and 49ers, and they do have Todd Gurley. LUKE MILLER

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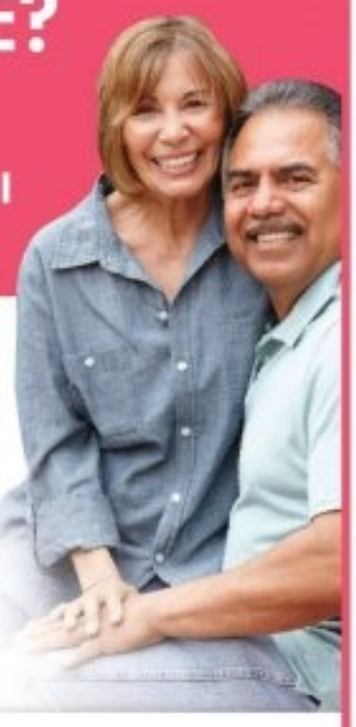

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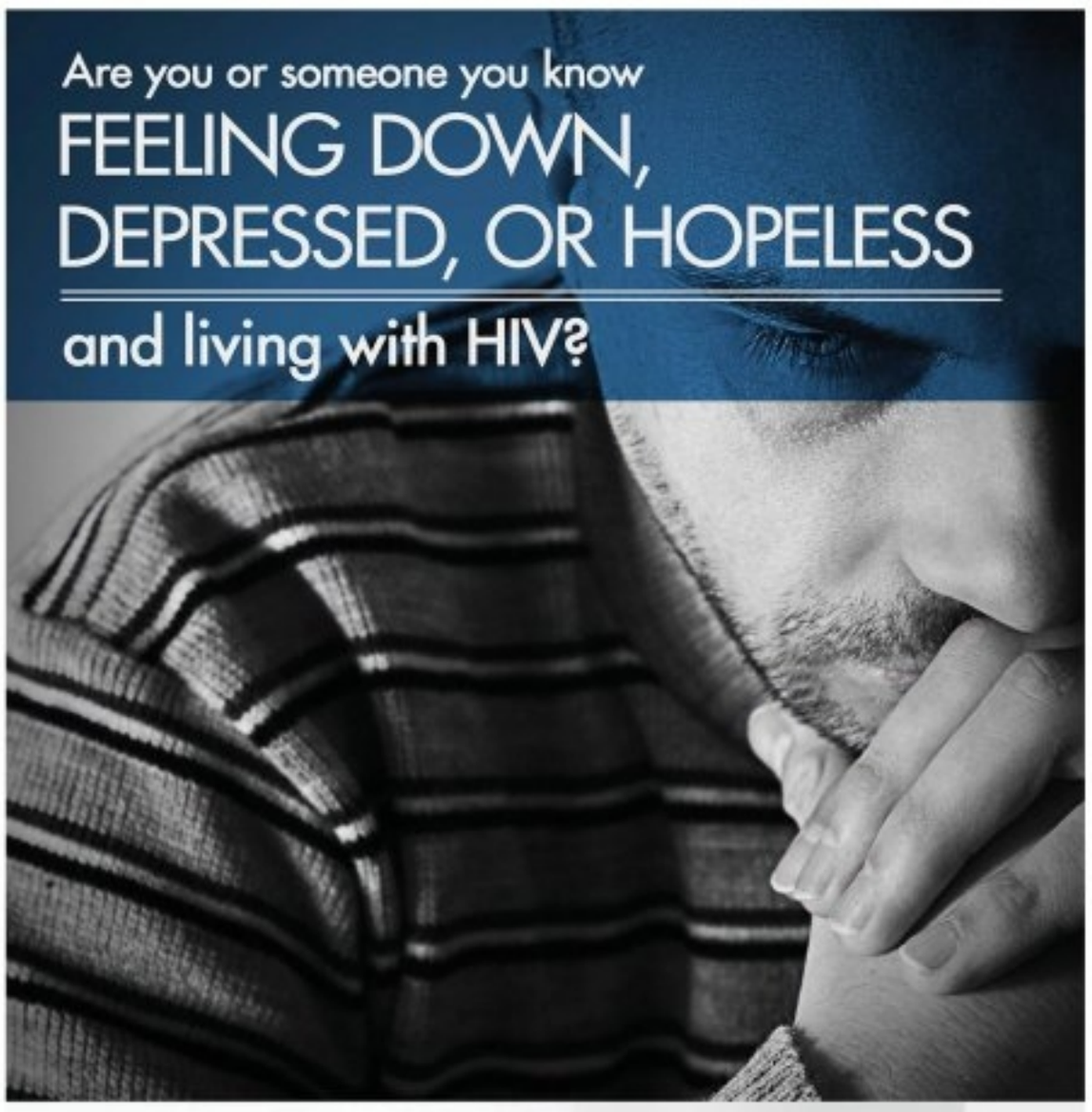

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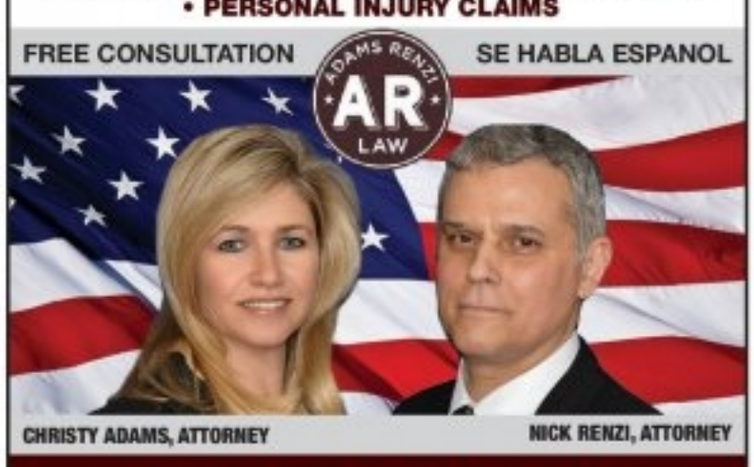

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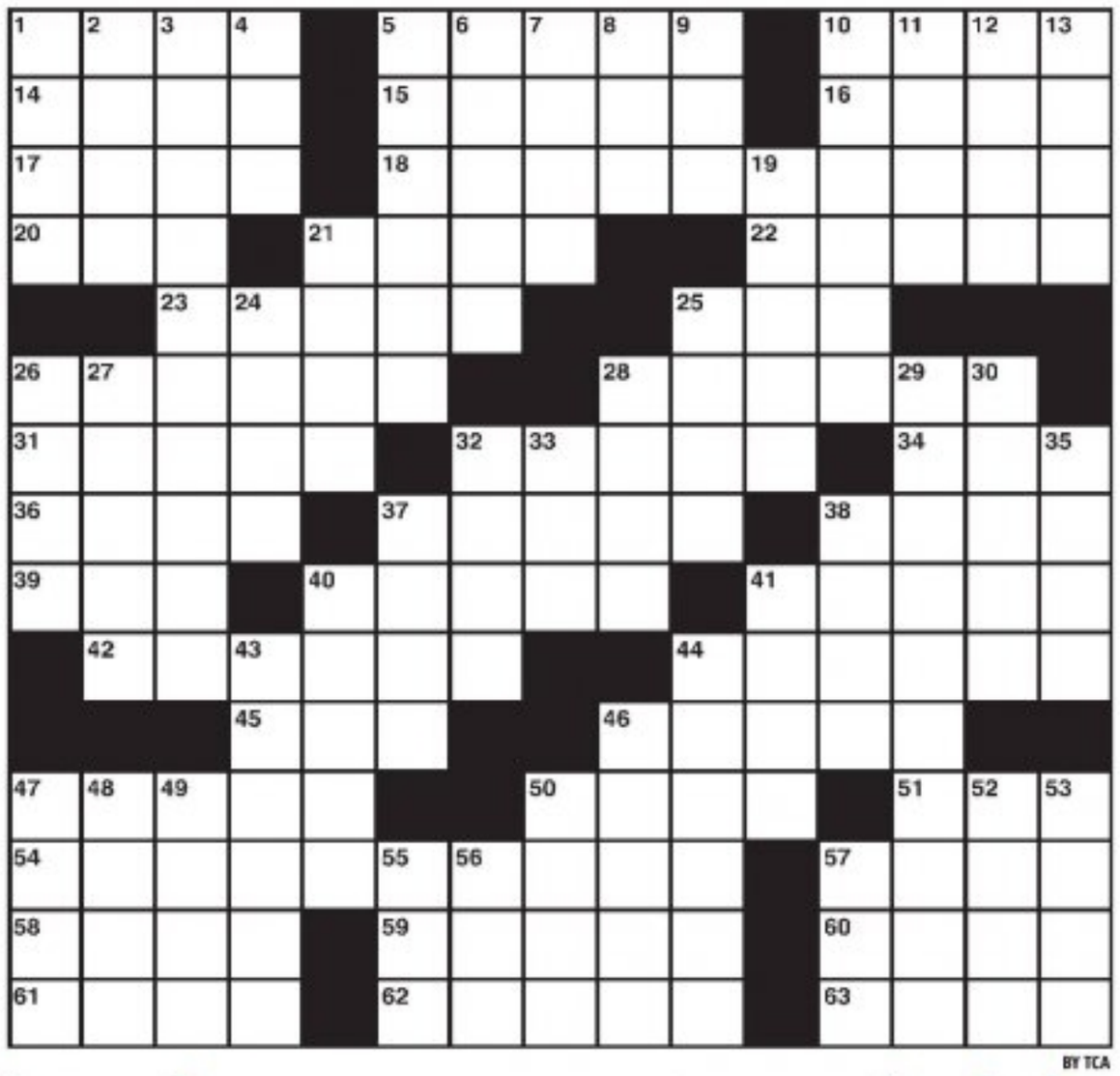

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25 Presidential initials
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28 Sounds
31 Furious
32 Info on a sales tag
34 Took a load off
36 Short letter
37 Slight pin poke
38 Agile
39 Sticky stuff
40 Skier's incline
41 Inexpensive
42 Noisy quarrel
44 Crude
45 Little guy
46 __-frutti
47 Chocolate source
50 Greek letters
51 Laundry soap
54 Single, and dating no one
57 Unhappy
58 Humerus or scapula
59 Sound of a grandfather clock
60 Wapitis
61 Lumberjack tools
62 Mah-jongg pieces
63 Watches

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3 Lawmaker
4 Sullivan and Bradley
5 Largest city in Greece
6 Practical joke
7 Half-quart
8 Youth
9 Common street name
10 Shorts
11 Chef
12 Actor Rob
13 Curry & others
19 Albert, for one
21 __ as a button
24 Windy day toy
25 Wooden pier
26 Warble
27 "Smoking gun"
28 Pleasant
29 In particular
30 Alaska's Palin
32 Experts
33 Tear
35 Do a secretary's job
37 Drama
38 Close
40 Move over a bit
41 Persians & others
43 Lessens
44 Directs
46 __ song; movie opener
47 Havana's land
48 Strong as __
49 Candy __; stocking stuffer
50 Donahue or Collins
52 Gospel writer
53 "The __ said, the better"
55 __ up; misbehave
56 Tai __; meditative exercise
57 Quilters' gathering

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